

14 November 2019

GRADUATE PROJECT PROPOSAL

1) What do you want to make?

I want to research how contemporary manual and/or precarious workers are portrayed in documentary film and photography. In the theoretical research I am undertaking for my thesis, this will take the form of analysing two case studies, my own work and the relation between them.

In parallel to my thesis, I am also researching by making images that portray said subjects. The kind of workers I am interested in are people that perform manual labour and that have an unstable financial situation: a common thread for those who work in the service industry and that are often on zero hours or freelance contracts.

Starting from their jobs I intend to make a portrait of each person, investigating their identity, their relationship with what they do and their aspirations.

I intend to film each person while at work and, as they become more confident with my presence and the camera's, ask them questions.

These portraits will take the form of short documentaries.

The first person I had planned to film is Leyla, a young woman from Rotterdam. She currently works in the service industry, she is also a trained makeup artist and occasionally has paying clients and models. The topics I intend to investigate with her are: the dual approach she may or may not have while performing the two different jobs, her aspirations and hopes for the future, how she describes and identifies herself, how she perceives the contemporary art world and her peers.

I already know a few details about her personal life but I am unsure whether she would be willing to share those on camera.

This research should begin with a conversation, assess what she is comfortable with: starting with filming her while she is in her apartment, doing some elaborate makeup on a friend and talk about her everyday job and what she aspires to do in the future.

As we progress into the conversation I aim to explore how her employment situation affects, more or less directly, other aspects of her life.

1b) How do you make a start?

Currently I have been unable to fix a date to start the filming with Leyla, as often happens with documentary. I am therefore looking into other potential subjects.

2) How do you plan to make it?

- a) Practical research: interviewing my first subject. I have a general idea for the theme of this film but I'm open to changes depending on what I discover through the interviews. At the same time I am looking for other subjects that can fit the theme of *workers* and add new perspectives to this.

During the next couple of months I plan on interviewing the potential subjects.

Those interviews would give me a basis of content. I can make several small portraits or one larger piece. My priority is for the film(s) to have depth and a poetic language. This means that I have to push beyond the regular talking head, I need my subjects to be comfortable enough with me and with the camera so that I can be in their everyday lives and record the events. This will likely mean that I need to spend long periods of time with each of them, so that I can reach that intimacy and closeness with the people in front of the camera.

- b) Theoretical research: a) find documentaries that explore similar topics, analyse them and make useful notes, learn from them; b) read articles and texts that cover similar topics: what questions can I ask? What kind of approach could I take? c) following some tutorials with my tutors I plan to have a list of more academic readings that can inform this project.

3) What is your timetable?

- September-October-November: funding applications, drafting and discussing ideas, primary research.
- November-December: initial filming, refining the film's theme based on the outcome of the interviews.
- January-February: further filming, explore topics in more depth, get closer to subjects, refine questions.
- March: first rough cut.
- April-May: extra shooting/reshooting.
- May-June: sound editing, colour grading, titles and credits, final cut.

My timetable will change based on needs and availability of the subjects, and, above all, based on the direction I choose to take. The theme *workers* is still too broad and open. As I move on in developing and refining it I will also have a better idea of my timetable.

4) Why do you want to make it?

Because I see value, relevance and importance in portraying people at work, in their everyday activities. I am interested in researching how much a person's everyday activity defines them despite the fact that they may not necessarily find it satisfying or interesting. If one's aspiration, and perhaps talent, is of artistic nature but their main occupation is waiting tables or typing into excel sheets or mopping floors, how does that affect their definition of themselves? Is one occupation more important than the other?

When looking at my first subject I see part of myself and my background in her, there is familiarity and at the same time a certain fascination for what I still don't know about her and her life.

Aesthetically, I am fascinated by manual labour, it's physicality and repetitiveness. Repeated gestures that are performed for a physical, mundane and needed outcome have, to me, a ritual-like value. There is choreography that one performs in physical jobs that I am interested in capturing.

5) Who can help you and how?

I have selected two works (so far) from contemporary artists (a documentary filmmaker and a photographer) that have been informing and inspiring my practice in the last year. I intend to use their works as case studies for my thesis but I also would like to interview them to better understand their process and intentions.

Feedback and support from tutors and fellow students: Simon and Barend would have some useful feedback and advice as they are both filmmakers and are familiar with the documentary mode. Other tutors with a more fine arts oriented practice would also be of great help as their comments would come from a different perspective and could push me to find my own voice. Furthermore, I am finding working on my thesis and the feedback I receive from my first reader to be of great help in informing this project.

Practical help during shoots and in post production stage from fellow students: having a crew, even a small one, during a documentary shoot can be useful but it might also inhibit the subject. Depending on where and who I am shooting I know I can ask my fellow students for some help, which of course I would return when needed.

During post production other students' help would be of immense value as I can show them rough cuts and get a fresh perspective from their critique.

6) Relation to previous practice.

Documentary is a form that I have used before but never to explore these topics or to portray individuals as I intend to do this time. Previous documentary pieces were telling stories of places and/or groups of people (*Kensington Stories*, *Block Symphony*, *Making History*); some of them were commissioned and therefore restricted my autonomy (*Kensington Stories*, *Making History*); whilst others were autonomous and more experimental projects (*Block Symphony*).

I worked on projects which involved talking with people about their family history and unresolved issues which are not always dramatic but nonetheless are significant to the individual involved (*Chimeras* 2017; *Al Vetro* 2013). In the piece *Chimeras*, for example, I interviewed women who had moved from place to place; they took a family memory and recited the monologue as if through the mouth of the ancestor or relative. This experiment took the form of an experimental moving image piece about identity, migration and testimony.

This graduation project would combine these two trends (the documentary form and the interest in personal stories) together.

7) Relation to larger context.

At this stage I identify two important aspects that should be considered during the researching and the making of this project.

The first one is that of precarious, physical and often underpaid labour. From Lumiere's *Workers leaving the factory* in 1895, through Italian Neorealism and to more recent documentaries exposing the working conditions of factory workers all over the world, this topic has taken different voices and shapes, contents have changed together with our economy and our view of the globalised world.

The second theme is that of this new generation of workers in western societies that perform both a day job, to make a living, and a passion, often freelance, job that reflects their aspirations and talents. This hybrid identity sees the coexistence of alienating working days and passion fueled activities. The permanent, stable, full time job has for many become something from the baby boomers era, and is often (if at all) achieved later in life.

8) References.

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